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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 000188

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PK](#)

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT MUSHARRAF AND CODEL LIEBERMAN DISCUSS BILATERAL
RELATIONSHIP

Classified By: CDA Peter Bodde, for reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

Summary

[11](#). (C) SUMMARY. In a January 9 meeting with Codel Lieberman, Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf explained the mechanisms to ensure the election process is free and fair, and commented on improved relations with Afghanistan. Lieberman delivered two messages: (1) the February 18 general elections should be free and fair for Pakistan's government to maintain international credibility; and (2) the U.S.- Pakistan bilateral relationship is even more important now since both countries are allies in the fight against terrorism. END SUMMARY.

[12](#). (C) Senator Joseph Lieberman and Ambassador met January 9 with President Pervez Musharraf at the Rawalpindi encampment. Topics covered included: importance of the bilateral relationship, Pakistan's upcoming Parliamentary elections, media restrictions, and Afghanistan.

Importance of the bilateral relationship

[13](#). (C) Stating that he "did not know of a more important bilateral relationship," Lieberman expressed strong support for continued friendship with Pakistan during this "complicated time." While noting that the U.S. Congress follows events in Pakistan very closely, he expressed "concern over the events with the media and courts last fall" as well as appreciation that the state of emergency has now been lifted. Lieberman strongly emphasized that the upcoming elections must be free and fair, and stressed that it will be critical for Pakistanis to perceive that the government itself has done everything possible to hold free and fair elections.

[14](#). (C) Musharraf agreed that the bilateral relationship is well on track, specifically citing the strong military cooperation. He emphasized that "all of his actions last year were justified and necessary," but "the current misfortune of Benazir Bhutto's assassination has created a problem of unimaginable magnitude for Pakistan." Citing the recent riots, Musharraf noted an enormous impact on politics, economics, as well as energy shortages and law and order problems. (Comment: Musharraf noted that he had just finished drafting a four page paper to the American Bar Association to fully explain the rationale for the state of emergency. Ambassador

Durrani will deliver a copy of this paper to the Department. End
Comment.)

Elections

15. (C) Turning to elections, Musharraf noted having both Asif Zardari and Bilalwal Bhutto Zardari at the helm of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) was an "odd arrangement." He also noted the turmoil within both the PPP and the Bhutto clan. Musharraf commented that Pakistan's feudal traditions and inheritance system "prohibit democracy from existing within the political parties themselves."

16. (C) In addition to free, fair and transparent elections, Musharraf has now also added a new word- "peaceful." The need to have peaceful elections requires using the army to provide security on election day. Noting that there are 64,000 polling stations across Pakistan, Musharraf said that army forces will not be at all locations but will be deployed. Musharraf wondered "who will determine if the elections are to be perceived as free fair and transparent?" He noted that Zardari has already made statements claiming that if the PPP loses, then the elections will not have been free, fair and transparent.

17. (C) Responding to Lieberman's question about the Election Commission, Musharraf claimed that the electoral system is inherently fair, and that his introduction of the caretaker government system has improved the governmental transition. Stating that previous fraud has occurred during the transmission of results from the polling stations to the central stations in Islamabad, Musharraf explained the new additional changes include posting results at each polling station. He also noted that each candidate is allowed to have a

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representative sitting in the polling station to observe the counting. He claimed that the 2002 election problems occurred because the voter lists were not based on the national identity cards and in some cases, the same person was able to vote up to five times.

The draft 2007 voter lists were short by approximately 20 million voters. However, he noted that in the upcoming elections, both the new and old national identity cards would be accepted. He explained that a mobile system would be deployed to get identity cards to all.

18. (C) Lieberman suggested that perhaps Ambassador Durrani could write an article or give a presentation to Senators in Washington explaining the election system so that Congress and the public opinion understand the system and that the elections can be free and fair.

19. (C) Lieberman remarked on these improvements and further suggested exit polling may also reduce the grounds for allegations of fraud. Musharraf explained that, in addition to his personal mistrust of polling "in which the questions skew results", exit polling will not work in Pakistan. Stating that voters do not want to tell others how they have cast their ballots if they break from the family and tribal alliances which are dominant throughout Pakistani society. He further lamented that, in some cases you will have a clan vote together for another member, regardless of whether that person is perceived to be a good person or not stating "the clan will always prevail."

Media restrictions

110. (C) Lieberman asked about the status of the media restrictions, particularly focusing on the two GEO television stations which are still closed. Musharraf explained that GEO is a conglomerate with five news channels and four entertainment channels, and that all but two channels have reopened. He expressed his concerns that the media created have particularly demoralized the armed forces. Musharraf further stated that Pakistan as a nation lacks self-confidence and noted that "our problems are not even one tenth of India's in terms of socio-economic issues, yet the world sees us as nothing compared to India." Lieberman acknowledged that not all media coverage is

positive, but that it is essential to let all opinions be expressed and the stations must be reopened.

Afghanistan

¶11. (C) Lieberman recounted his recent discussions in Afghanistan with President Karzai. To the great interest of President Musharraf, Lieberman noted that President Karzai was positive about the "shared common interest" between Pakistan and Afghanistan and "went out of his way to emphasize" the positive meetings Karzai recently had with Musharraf in Islamabad. Musharraf noted that neither he "nor the army nor ISI had changed but that Karzai himself was refusing to accept the ground realities." Musharraf further elaborated that he and Karzai had realized "they were neutralizing each other and must work together."

¶12. (C) Lieberman expressed his continued support and noted that both Pakistan and Afghanistan will emerge stronger through cooperation. Lieberman noted that the U.S. and President Bush remain very supportive. Musharraf noted his reciprocal feelings for President Bush, particularly his "sincerity and straight talk" and apologized if President Bush suffers due to his relationship with Pakistan. Lieberman noted that some short term political problems are possible, but that our mutual work to combat extremism is in the national interest of the United States. Responding to Musharraf's claim that he is caught between "a rock and a hard place," Lieberman noted that Musharraf's leadership can bring Pakistan to a stronger place.

¶13. (U) Codel Lieberman did not clear on this message.

PATTERSON